

CHAPTER SEVEN

Living Together

I. INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS

THE people of Shamirpet, like the other peasants of Andhra, exercise considerable reserve in their initial dealings with outsiders. The first impression that one gets regarding their attitude is one of extreme constriction, suspiciousness and guarded behaviour. When this initial reserve is broken down, they reveal themselves in a totally different light—as emotional, communicative, and at times even boisterous. Nearly all of them have great curiosity, and are easily attracted by anything that is even slightly uncommon or unusual. Opinions are freely expressed, and all public gatherings—big or small—are rather noisy. Middle-aged and elderly people generally have a grim expression, and it is considered a mark of respectability in women if they walk with their eyes downcast. But unobtrusiveness is not regarded as a virtue, and the people freely make comments and counter-comments on all subjects with which they may or may not have any concern. There is a great tradition for argument, which can easily drift into becoming a noisy quarrel or altercation. Tempers rise easily, and abuse may be showered volubly by both sides; but differences are patched up as easily, and it is not uncommon to see two people walking together as great friends although on the previous day they may have quarrelled bitterly on some trifling issue. In their inter-personal relations the people are hypercritical and very sensitive. This leads to a perpetual attitude of fault finding. As the people do not easily let go an opportunity of commenting on and criticizing their neighbours, their relations are never very smooth and certain. However, on occasions which demand a display of good-neighbourliness and generosity people

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571 come forward very readily to help those who need it. It is common
 157 to suspect others' motives; and not unusual to be always on the
 alert to read hidden meanings into the seemingly innocent utter-
 ances of others. Analysis of their life-histories shows that the
 people are not given to introspection. They are always on the de-
 fensive; but their inter-personal relations are not characterized by
 detachment. In their thoughts, likes and dislikes they are quite
 open, and all persons having even casual contacts have a fair
 acquaintance with one another's ideas and attitudes

827 It is not uncommon for people to analyse and describe the
 [186] personality-traits of other inhabitants of the village as well as of
 577 outsiders coming into the settlement. Positive qualities, having
 obvious approval, find expression in such epithets as: 'good
 person', 'hard-working', 'honest', 'respectable', 'well-behaved',
 'intelligent', 'generous' or 'large-hearted' and 'faithful'. Epithets
 describing negative traits which do not meet with social approval
 are many and varied, and among others include: 'bad person',
 'lazy', 'dishonest', 'shameless', 'mannerless', 'foolish', 'miserly',
 'small-hearted', 'unfaithful', 'good-for-nothing', 'liar', 'all talk but
 [521] no deeds', 'ill-tempered', etc. Analysis of such traits is firmly estab-
 lished in the culture-pattern, and occupies an important place in
 the conversation of the people when they meet in small groups.

[183] Although conformity to social norms is idealized and emphasized,
 when there is a breach of traditional ways the person respon-
 sible likes to confess it in confidence to someone else. Long con-
 versations and the mutual sharing of secrets are quite frequent.
 However, when friendships break up the sanctity of earlier
 secrets is not protected by any code of honour. Within limits
 originality and innovation are admired; but excess and ostentation
 soon lead to social censure and ridicule.

827 Subjects coming under the critical eye of society are: (i)
 626 breaches of traditional norms, (ii) display and exhibitionism, (iii)
 577 sexuality, (iv) efforts to rise in the power hierarchy, (v) conspicuous
 success, and (vi) originality and 'too many new ideas'. Carrying
 tales and 'whispering about the doings in others' houses' go on
 in the community on a wide scale. It is criticized by the aggrieved
 persons and their sympathizers, but no one regards it as inherently
 bad. 'Incidents' or breaches of established norms are discussed
 in small conversational groups at first, and the more important
 ones among them gradually filter through and reach the respon-